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EDITORS' TABLE.

EDITORS: A. S. PACKARD AND E. D. COPE.

—— There is little difference of opinion among the scientific men of this country as to the great value of Government aid to scientific research. Not only is its importance obvious to them as craftsmen, but as citizens. It is not worth while to make nice theoretical distinctions between State and United States rights in this matter, for the great point is to secure, in the language of Smithson of illustrious memory, "the increase and diffusion of knowledge among men," and especially the men of this country. If the State governments are too indifferent to their own interests to foster the work, let the General Government sustain it. Its utility is two-fold. The one object which is alway obvious, is the exploration and exposition of the resources of the country. The other, no less important, but less understood, is the development and occupation of the intellectual force, activity and thought of the men of the country. The cultivation of man is the most important of human enterprises, and a republican form of government rests on a basis of such cultivation. The government aid to the universities of Germany is one of the principal assurances of progressive, or even continued, civilization which the world possesses. As the Government of the United States does not aid the universities of the country, it should not fail to sustain and develop its own system, which embraces the various scientific bureaus at Washington.

It has sometimes been objected that the great power of the Government treasury constitutes it such a rival, as to seriously discourage private enterprise in this direction. There are two reasons why this reasoning is fallacious. First, the field of science is so vast that no organization can cover it; there is always room for workers, especially at the top. Second, brains are not produced by money, and ideas are not for sale on demand. The thinker who produces ideas on $1500 a year, will only be too glad to have some one in Government employ to illustrate them with larger resources. Moreover there are some departments of scientific work in which the Government can have few or no rivals. These are the expensive enterprises which private persons can rarely sustain. Such are deep-sea explorations; harmonious geodetic surveys over wide areas; geological surveys in regions which are for some reason inaccessible or dangerous;

also excavations for fossils on any but a limited scale. The creation and support of scientific museums and laboratories must have the assistance of a heavy purse; and finally, governments have generally been the only medium of publication of results on any considerable scale.

Official science has, however, no shield of Achilles which shall protect her from the usual temptations of power and from the methods of politics. It is true that she more surely stands or falls on her merits than any other representative of human labor, yet as she is the teacher of mankind, who is to decide the question of merit? That she may become corrupted, so that the love of fame and power may supplant the love of knowledge, is not impossible. The man of politics can see and understand this, and whether true or not, charges against scientific men holding official position will be preferred, as in the case of other office-holders. The public press has on various recent occasions applied the term "political scientist," and has attempted to point out persons to whom the expression is appropriate. Although a "political scientist" is a conceivable person, the applications made by the newspapers have been wide of the mark. The term is not appropriate to a man because he secures large or small appropriations from Congress to be expended on scientific work. All honor to such men, whoever they are. Their country and the world owe them gratitude, not sneers.

If we were to seek to define a "political scientist" we would describe him as a man who sought the aid of the resources of the Government to hold an office for its emoluments or honors to which his abilities and services to science do not entitle him. In order to do this he will reproduce the ideas of others without acknowledgment; he will endeavor, through means well known to men in official position, to suppress criticism of his work, and thus to reach an eminence of popular reputation which is purely factitious. Such would be a man who might appear to fulfill the duties of his position by the employment of persons to do his scientific work for him. A "political scientist" would spend little time in his study, and a great deal of time with prominent persons of all kinds, gaining the "influence" that comes from personal representations in the many quarters where the merits of questions of science are unknown. The "political scientist" might flourish for a time in this country, and his existence would be a constant menace to the prosperity of Government scientific enterprises, and would react disastrously on the men of real merit.

—— The Legislature of Michigan has done itself discredit in the treatment of the last Geological Survey of that State. It removed Professor Rominger, a most competent man, and put in his place a man less known, who, however, has his future in his own hands. It refuses to publish the report of Professor Rominger, although the money for this purpose is in the hands of the State treasurer. This money was saved from his meager appropriation by Professor Rominger, who thus offers to the Legislature a rare example of economy. The governing body of Michigan should recognize this fact by returning the money to their ex-State-geologist, and publishing the report without delay by a new appropriation. Professor Rominger has the endorsement of the geologists of the country.

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RECENT LITERATURE.

ROMANES' RESEARCHES ON THE NERVOUS SYSTEMS OF JELLY AND STAR-FISH.[1]—The beautiful researches and discovery by Haeckel of a nervous system in Geryonia, consisting of true ganglion cells and true nerve-fibers, and the extension by the Hertwig brothers of our knowledge of the nervous system of Medusæ in general, especially the naked-eyed forms, marked a most important step in animal morphology.

These microscopical observations were, except Haeckel's discovery, forestalled by the physiological experiments of Professor Eimer and Dr. Romanes, who, however, worked independently of each other. In the present work Dr. Romanes gives a popular account of his own researches, with due mention of and credit to Dr. Eimer's researches in the same direction.

After having some account of the structure of the Medusæ, we are afforded the results of fundamental experiments. The author proved that excision of the extreme margin of a nectocalyx (or umbrella) of the naked-eyed Medusæ causes immediate, total and permanent paralysis of the entire organ. This result is striking and decided. Indeed, adds the author, "I do not know of any case in the animal kingdom where the removal of a center of spontaneity causes so sudden and so complete a paralysis of the muscular system, there being no subsequent movements or twitchings of a reflex kind to disturb the absolute quiescence of the mutilated organism. The experiment is particularly beautiful if performed on Sarsia; for the members of this genus being remarkably active, the death-like stillness which results from the loss of so minute a portion of their substance is rendered by contrast the more surprising." On the other hand the severed margin "continues its rhythmical contractions with a vigor and a pertinacity not in the least impaired by its severance from the main organism, so that the contrast between the perfectly motionless swimming-bell and the active contractions of the thread-like portion which has just been removed from its margin is as striking a contrast as it is possible to conceive." But though in the

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[1] *The International Scientific Series.* Jelly-fish, Star-fish and Sea-urchins. Being a research on primitive nervous systems. By GEORGE J. ROMANES, LL.D., F.R.S. New York, D. Appleton & Co., 1885. 12mo, pp. 323.